

First confirmed record of Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens* for Niger

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Première mention confirmée du Pic cardinal *Dendropicos fuscescens* pour le Niger. Le 18 février 2006, alors qu'un vent de sable a contraint de nombreux migrateurs à se poser le long de la vallée du fleuve Niger avant d'entamer la traversée du Sahara, un Pic cardinal *Dendropicos fuscescens* a été observé près de Tillabéri (14°09'N 01°31'E). Il s'agit de la première observation confirmée de l'espèce au Niger. Seule une ancienne publication de 1950 sur les noms d'animaux en Tamasheq fait mention de cette espèce dans la région de Tahoua mais sans plus de détail.

In the morning of 18 February 2006, I was birding along the N1 road between Niamey and Tillabéri (14°09'N 01°31'E). The area is on the left (northern) bank of the Niger River and comprises dry fields and rocky outcrops with some shrubs and small trees. Dominant tree species are acacias, alternating with dense thickets of *Balanites aegyptica*, of maximum 3–4 m height.

Winds blowing from the north and carrying sand strongly limited visibility, and apparently caused Palearctic migrants to land before attempting to cross the Sahara, as the trees and bushes were alive with insectivores, feeding amongst the branches or on the ground. Species included Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* (the commonest), Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*, Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*. There were also singles of Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*, Rufous Scrub Robin *C. galactotes* and Orphean Warbler *Sylvia hortensis*.

During this activity, I heard an unfamiliar call comprising a rapid series of rattling *kree-kree-kree-kree* notes. I soon noticed a small woodpecker, c.10 m away, with pale cheeks, green upperparts and faintly spotted yellow-green wing-coverts. Although the bird was fairly shy and preferred the far side of the trunk, I observed it periodically for c.3 minutes through 10×42 binoculars. Back in the car I wrote down the following additional details: red nape and hindcrown, becoming dark brownish on forecrown and forehead; very pale whitish head-sides with some faint dark streaks and a narrow dark grey malar stripe; throat

whitish; upper breast and flanks slightly streaked; orange-red uppertail-coverts.

The bird was none of the four woodpecker species known from Niger (Giraudoux *et al.* 1986, Dowsett 1993). Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos goertae* and Fine-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera punctuligera* are, amongst other differences, much larger. The similar-sized Brown-backed Woodpecker *Picoides obsoletus* and Little Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos elachus* have brown or grey-brown, not green, upperparts. The bird exactly matched the description of adult male Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens* (Borrow & Demey 2001).

In West Africa, Cardinal Woodpecker *D. f. lafresnayi* is scarce to locally common over a broad belt of wooded habitats, from Senegambia to Sierra Leone and east to Nigeria (Fry *et al.* 1986, Borrow & Demey 2001). It occurs in south-east Burkina Faso (Green & Sayer 1979), c.300 km from where I observed the species in Niger. A few records north of its known breeding range have been reported, in central Burkina Faso and coastal Mauritania (Lamarche 1988, Thonnerieux *et al.* 1989). For Niger, a publication on Tamasheq animal names mentions the occurrence of '*Dendropicos lafresnayi zechi* NEUM.' in the Tahoua region, without further details (Nicolas 1950). The observation reported here thus constitutes the first documented record for Niger.

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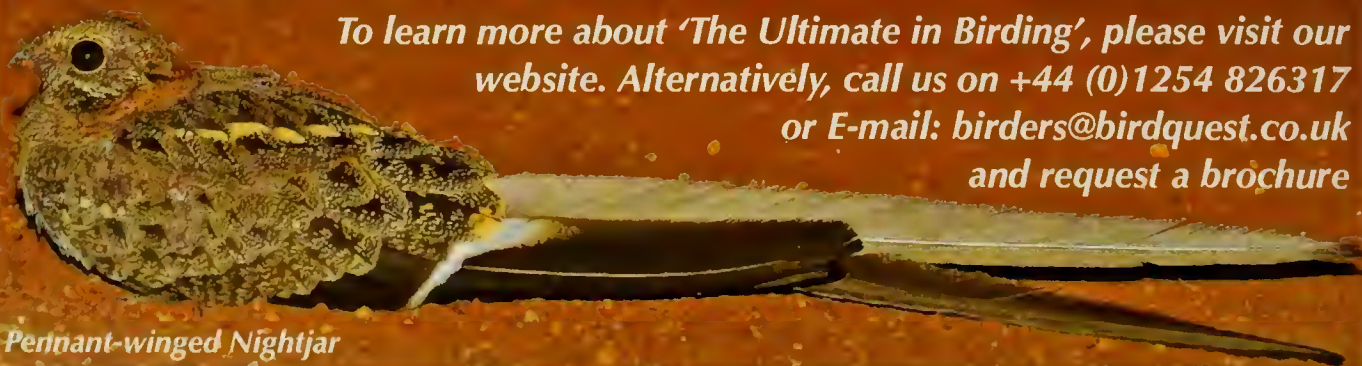
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